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Preface

The three volumes VIII/1A, B, C document the state of the art of "Laser Physics and Applications". Scientific trends and related technological aspects are considered by compiling results and conclusions from phenomenology, observation and experiments. Reliable data, physical fundamentals and detailed references are presented.

In the recent decades the laser source matured to an universal tool common to scientific research as well as to industrial use. Today the main technical goal is the generation of optical power towards shorter wavelengths, shorter pulses, higher efficiency and higher power for applications in science and industry. Tailoring the optical energy in wavelength, space and time is a requirement for the investigation of laser-induced processes, i.e. excitation, non-linear amplification, storage of optical energy, etc. According to the actual trends in laser research and development, Vol. VIII/1 is split into three parts: Vol. VIII/1A with its two subvolumes 1A1 and 1A2 covers laser fundamentals, Vol. VIII/1B deals with laser systems and Vol. VIII/1C gives an overview on laser applications.

In Vol. VIII/1A2 the following topics are treated in detail:

Part 5: Quantum optics

The quantum aspects of the electromagnetic field, represented by the photon, become of increasing importance, not only in scientific research, but also in applications. Examples are the stabilization of lasers and the lower limit of bandwidth, but also the entangled photons, quantum cryptography and their use in information technology.

This part compiles the basic elements of quantum aspects, starting with the quantization of the electromagnetic field, discussing the crucial experiments to prove the Bell inequality and Bose-Einstein condensation. The basic process of the laser, the mechanism of atom-field interaction, is presented in detail.

Part 6: Coherence and superradiance

In Part 6.1 the basic concepts of coherence including photon statistics are presented for classical and non-classical light. The parameters of interest to characterize the degree of temporal and spatial coherence are defined and experimental setups for their measurement are discussed. Part 6.2 deals with superradiance, also known as superfluorescence, amplified spontaneous emissions (ASE), or cooperative spontaneous emission, predicted already 1954 by Dicke. Although long time a phenomenon of more academic interest, it becomes now of importance for X-ray lasers, which operate mainly in the ASE-regime.

Part 7: Optical components

In three parts, the engineering aspects of modulators, thin-film technology, and beam shaping are compiled. For additional optical components see "Linear optics" (Part 3 of Vol. VIII/1A1).

The modulation of light is essential for most applications in data transmission as well as in material processing. The two relevant modulators, the electro-optical and the acousto-optical systems, are discussed in detail in Part 7.1 with many useful parameters in several tables.

Mirrors, polarizers and beam splitters are elements of major importance for the generation and handling of laser radiation. The quality of optical elements is in many cases the limiting factor for laser efficiency and output intensity. Therefore, thin-film technology plays a key role in laser engineering. In Part 7.2 the basis elements of thin-film systems are presented and the principles of production are compiled. The crucial quality parameters and their measurement are discussed in detail. The extensive references give access to detailed information.

In many cases, especially in material processing, the intensity structure of the laser output field has to be adapted to the special application. This requires beam shaping. Part 7.3 summarizes various elements of low-loss beam transforming with experimental examples.

Part 8: Optical resonators

Laser parameters as beam quality, output power, efficiency, misalignment sensitivity, intensity structure are determined by the optical resonator. In this part all types of optical resonators (stable, unstable, linear devices, ring resonators, wave-guide systems) are compiled together with experimental results and data relevant for a reliable construction. Special emphasis is laid on the real amplifying medium, which strongly influences the resonator by thermal effects and gain saturation.

Part 9: Interferometry

Although a classical field of metrology, it has become of increasing importance with the availability of coherent light sources and is on the way to become a powerful tool in many fields of optics. Part 9 starts with the basic facts of interference and coherence. All relevant interferometer types are described in detail. An extensive survey on the special procedures of measurement techniques including new methods as speckle interferometry, adaptive optics or digital holography is given. Many experimental results complete this part. A comprehensive list of references allows to gather detailed information.

August 2006 The Editors

Contents

Part 5 Quantum optics

5.1 Quantum optics
F. Haug, M. Freyberger, K. Vogel, W.P. Schleich . . . 3

5.1.1 Introduction . . . 3
5.1.1.1 A brief history of quantum optics . . . 3
5.1.1.2 Outline of the review . . . 4

5.1.2 Field quantization in Coulomb gauge . . . 5
5.1.2.1 Mode expansion . . . 5
5.1.2.1.1 Running waves . . . 6
5.1.2.1.2 Standing waves . . . 6
5.1.2.1.3 Energy of the radiation field . . . 7
5.1.2.2 Field quantization . . . 7
5.1.2.3 Single mode . . . 8

5.1.3 Field states . . . 8
5.1.3.1 Pure and mixed states . . . 9
5.1.3.2 Photon number states . . . 9
5.1.3.3 Coherent states . . . 10
5.1.3.4 Squeezed states . . . 11
5.1.3.5 Thermal states . . . 12
5.1.3.6 Measures of non-classicality . . . 13
5.1.3.6.1 Mandel Q-parameter . . . 13
5.1.3.6.2 Glauber–Sudarshan distribution . . . 13

5.1.4 Atom–field interaction . . . 14
5.1.4.1 Electric field–dipole interaction . . . 14
5.1.4.2 Simple model for atom–field interaction . . . 14
5.1.4.2.1 Hamiltonian . . . 15
5.1.4.2.2 Dynamics of Jaynes–Cummings–Paul model . . . 15
5.1.4.2.3 Quantum motion in an ion trap . . . 16
5.1.4.3 Quantum state engineering . . . 16
5.1.4.3.1 Resonant case: photon number state preparation . . . 16
5.1.4.3.2 Far off-resonant case: Schrödinger cat state preparation . . . 17

5.1.5 Reservoir theory . . . 18
5.1.5.1 Master equation . . . 18
5.1.5.1.1 Mathematics of the model . . . 18
5.1.5.1.2 Methods of solution . . . 18
5.1.5.2 Damping and amplification . . . 19
5.1.5.3 Decoherence . . . 19

5.1.6 One-atom maser . . . 20
5.1.6.1 Master equation . . . 21
5.1.6.2 Steady-state photon statistics . . . 21

5.1.7 Atom–reservoir interaction . . . 22
5.1.7.1 Master equation . . . 22
5.1.7.2 Lamb shift . . . 23
5.1.7.3 Weisskopf–Wigner decay . . . 23
5.1.8 Resonance fluorescence . . . 24
5.1.8.1 Model . . . 24
5.1.8.2 Spectrum and antibunching . . . 24
5.1.9 Fundamental questions of quantum mechanics . . . 26
5.1.9.1 Quantum jumps . . . 26
5.1.9.1.1 Continuous versus discontinuous dynamics . . . 26
5.1.9.1.2 Experimental observation . . . 27
5.1.9.2 Wave–particle duality . . . 28
5.1.9.2.1 Delayed choice experiments . . . 28
5.1.9.2.2 Quantum-optical tests of complementarity . . . 29
5.1.9.3 Entanglement . . . 30
5.1.9.4 Bell inequality . . . 31
5.1.10 New frontiers . . . 32
5.1.10.1 Atom optics in quantized fields . . . 32
5.1.10.2 Bose–Einstein condensation . . . 33
5.1.10.2.1 History . . . 34
5.1.10.2.2 Bose–Einstein condensation in dilute atomic gases . . . 34
5.1.10.2.3 Gross–Pitaevskii equation . . . 34
5.1.10.2.4 Experiments with Bose–Einstein condensates . . . 35
5.1.10.3 Quantum information . . . 36
5.1.10.3.1 Quantum teleportation . . . 36
5.1.10.3.2 Quantum cryptography . . . 38
References for 5.1 . . . 39

Part 6 Coherence and superradiance

6.1 Coherence
W. Martienssen, H. Paul . . . 49
6.1.1 Historical remarks . . . 49
6.1.2 Basic concepts . . . 49
6.1.2.1 Classical light . . . 49
6.1.2.2 Non-classical light . . . 50
6.1.2.3 Field mode . . . 50
6.1.2.4 Single-mode field . . . 50
6.1.2.5 Electric field strength . . . 50
6.1.2.6 Interference . . . 50
6.1.2.7 Decoherence . . . 51
6.1.3 Coherence theory . . . 51
6.1.3.1 Field correlation functions . . . 51
6.1.3.1.1 Definitions . . . 51
6.1.3.1.2 Connections between correlation functions of different order . . . 51
6.1.3.2 First-order coherence . . . 52
6.1.3.2.1 Degree of coherence . . . 52
6.1.3.2.2 Temporal coherence . . . 52
6.1.3.2.3 Spatial coherence . . . 53

6.1.3.2.4 Filtering out coherent light from a chaotic source . . . 55
6.1.3.2.5 Measurement of coherence lengths . . . 55
6.1.3.3 Laser light versus chaotic light . . . 55
6.1.3.3.1 Generating mechanisms and radiation characteristics . . . 55
6.1.3.3.1.1 Chaotic light . . . 55
6.1.3.3.1.2 Laser light . . . 55
6.1.3.3.2 Interference between beams from independent sources . . . 56
6.1.3.3.3 Coherent interaction . . . 56
6.1.3.4 Particle interference . . . 57
6.1.3.5 Higher-order coherence . . . 57
6.1.4 Intensity interference . . . 58
6.1.4.1 Formal description . . . 58
6.1.4.2 Measurement . . . 58
6.1.4.3 Spatial intensity correlations . . . 58
6.1.4.3.1 Stellar intensity interferometry . . . 58
6.1.4.4 Temporal intensity correlations . . . 59
6.1.4.4.1 Amplitude stabilization . . . 59
6.1.4.4.2 Photon bunching . . . 59
6.1.4.4.3 Photon antibunching . . . 59
6.1.4.5 Experiments with entangled photon pairs . . . 60
6.1.4.5.1 Parametric down-conversion . . . 60
6.1.4.5.2 Two-photon mixing . . . 60
6.1.4.5.2.1 Hong–Ou–Mandel interferometer . . . 60
6.1.4.5.3 Photon-pair interference . . . 61
6.1.4.5.3.1 Interferometric devices . . . 61
6.1.4.5.3.2 Franson experiment . . . 61
6.1.5 Photon counting statistics . . . 62
6.1.5.1 Measurement . . . 62
6.1.5.2 Photon distribution functions . . . 62
6.1.5.3 Measurements under different experimental conditions . . . 63
6.1.5.4 Variances of the photon number . . . 63
References for 6.1 . . . 64

6.2 Superradiance
M.G. Benedict, E.D. Trifonov . . . 67
6.2.1 Definitions and historical layout . . . 67
6.2.2 Superradiance theory . . . 68
6.2.2.1 Superradiance of a system with dimensions smaller than the radiation wavelength 68
6.2.2.2 Superradiation of an extended multiatomic system . . . 70
6.2.3 Superradiance experiments . . . 73
6.2.3.1 A microscopic observation of superradiance and subradiance . . . 74
6.2.3.2 Superradiance experiments in pencil-shaped macroscopic samples . . . 75
6.2.3.3 Superradiant-type Rayleigh scattering from a Bose–Einstein condensate . . . 77
6.2.4 Outlook . . . 78
References for 6.2 . . . 79

Part 7 Optical components

7.1 Modulators
B. Kuhlow ... 85
7.1.1 Introduction ... 85
7.1.2 Light propagation in crystals ... 86
7.1.3 Linear electro-optic effect ... 87
7.1.3.1 Modulator devices ... 87
7.1.3.1.1 Phase modulation ... 88
7.1.3.1.2 Polarization modulation (dynamic retardation) ... 89
7.1.3.1.3 Amplitude modulation ... 90
7.1.3.1.4 Design considerations ... 91
7.1.3.2 Traveling-wave modulator ... 91
7.1.3.3 Examples ... 92
7.1.3.3.1 Crystal classes ... 92
7.1.3.3.1.1 Crystal class $\bar{4}$2m ... 92
7.1.3.3.1.2 Crystal class 3m ... 92
7.1.3.3.1.3 Crystal class $\bar{4}$3m ... 93
7.1.3.3.2 Selected electro-optic materials and modulator systems ... 94
7.1.3.4 Electro-optic beam deflector ... 94
7.1.4 Kerr electro-optic effect modulators ... 96
7.1.4.1 Kerr effect in isotropic media ... 96
7.1.5 Acousto-optic modulators ... 98
7.1.5.1 The photoelastic effect ... 98
7.1.5.2 Interaction regimes ... 100
7.1.5.2.1 Raman–Nath regime ... 100
7.1.5.2.2 Bragg regime ... 101
7.1.5.2.2.1 Isotropic interaction ... 101
7.1.5.2.2.2 Anisotropic interaction ... 102
7.1.5.2.2.3 Efficiency ... 102
7.1.5.2.2.4 Bandwidth ... 103
7.1.5.3 Acousto-optic intensity modulator ... 106
7.1.5.4 Acousto-optic deflector ... 106
7.1.6 Glossary ... 108
References for 7.1 ... 110

7.2 Thin-film technology
D. Ristau ... 111
7.2.1 Introduction ... 111
7.2.2 Basic principle of optical thin-film systems ... 111
7.2.3 Production of optical coatings ... 114
7.2.4 Quality parameters of optical laser components ... 116
7.2.5 Measurement of critical parameters of laser components ... 117
7.2.5.1 Calorimetric measurement of absorption ... 117
7.2.5.2 Measurement of total scattering ... 119
7.2.5.3 Laser-induced damage thresholds ... 120
7.2.5.4 Quality parameters of laser components: present state ... 121

7.2.6 Examples for advanced laser components . . . 122
7.2.7 Summary and future trends . . . 123
References for 7.2 . . . 125

7.3 Beam shaping
M. Scholl . . . 127
7.3.1 Introduction . . . 127
7.3.2 Beam-shaping techniques and design procedures . . . 129
7.3.2.1 Beam transformation . . . 130
7.3.2.1.1 Coherent beams . . . 130
7.3.2.1.2 Partially coherent beams and geometric optic approximation . . . 132
7.3.2.1.3 Comparison of the geometric-optical solution with the solution from the coherent techniques . . . 133
7.3.2.2 Beam integration . . . 133
7.3.2.3 Beam integration with beamlet shaping . . . 137
7.3.2.4 Beam shaping and coherence . . . 138
7.3.2.5 Beam splitting . . . 139
7.3.2.6 Manufacturing of beam-shaping elements . . . 140
7.3.3 Conclusion . . . 142
References for 7.3 . . . 143

Part 8 Optical resonators

8.1 Optical resonators
N. Hodgson . . . 147
8.1.1 Introduction . . . 147
8.1.1.1 Linear stable resonators . . . 147
8.1.1.2 Linear unstable resonators . . . 147
8.1.1.3 Ring resonators . . . 148
8.1.1.4 Waveguide resonators . . . 148
8.1.1.5 Reviewing the basic properties of all optical resonators . . . 148
8.1.2 Classification of optical resonators . . . 149
8.1.3 Unconfined stable resonators . . . 151
8.1.3.1 Transverse mode structures . . . 152
8.1.3.1.1 Gauss–Laguerre and Gauss–Hermite modes . . . 152
8.1.3.1.2 Hybrid modes . . . 156
8.1.3.2 Beam propagation of stable resonator modes . . . 157
8.1.3.2.1 Fundamental mode . . . 157
8.1.3.2.2 Higher-order modes . . . 159
8.1.3.3 Beam quality and resonator parameters . . . 161
8.1.3.4 Resonance frequencies . . . 163
8.1.4 Aperture-limited stable resonators . . . 164
8.1.4.1 Resonators with one aperture . . . 164
8.1.4.2 Resonators with two apertures . . . 166
8.1.5 Misalignment sensitivity . . . 167
8.1.5.1 Fundamental-mode operation . . . 169
8.1.5.2 Multimode operation . . . 170

8.1.6 Unstable resonators . . . 172
8.1.6.1 Beam propagation . . . 172
8.1.6.1.1 Characterization of unstable resonators . . . 172
8.1.6.1.2 Resonator schemes . . . 174
8.1.6.2 Mode structures and losses . . . 176
8.1.6.3 Beam quality . . . 178
8.1.6.3.1 Circular symmetry . . . 178
8.1.6.3.2 Rectangular symmetry . . . 179
8.1.6.4 Unstable resonators with variable-reflectivity mirrors . . . 180
8.1.6.5 Applications of unstable resonators . . . 183
8.1.7 Output power of stable resonators . . . 184
8.1.7.1 Calculation of the output power of stable resonators . . . 184
8.1.7.2 Optimum output coupling and maximum output power . . . 187
8.1.7.2.1 Homogeneous line broadening . . . 188
8.1.7.2.2 Inhomogeneous line broadening . . . 190
8.1.8 Thermal lensing in solid-state lasers . . . 190
8.1.8.1 Fundamental-mode operation . . . 191
8.1.8.2 Transverse multimode operation . . . 194
8.1.9 Ring resonators . . . 196
8.1.9.1 General properties of ring resonators . . . 196
8.1.9.2 Unstable ring resonators . . . 198
8.1.9.3 Nonplanar ring resonators . . . 200
8.1.10 Waveguide resonators . . . 201
8.1.10.1 Motivation . . . 201
8.1.10.2 Eigenmodes of hollow rectangular waveguides . . . 202
8.1.10.3 Properties of waveguide resonators . . . 205
8.1.10.3.1 Waveguide resonator configurations . . . 206
8.1.10.3.1.1 Case I resonators . . . 206
8.1.10.3.1.2 Case II resonators . . . 206
8.1.10.3.1.3 Case III resonators . . . 206
8.1.10.3.2 Calculated round-trip losses of the lowest-loss resonator mode . . . 207
8.1.10.3.3 Mode properties of a general waveguide resonator . . . 208
8.1.10.4 Waveguide resonator mode and loss calculations . . . 208
8.1.10.5 Properties of slab waveguide lasers . . . 210
References for 8.1 . . . 213

Part 9 Interferometry

9.1 Interferometry
H.J. Tiziani, N. Kerwien, G. Pedrini . . . 221
9.1.1 Introduction . . . 221
9.1.2 Basic principles of interference . . . 222
9.1.2.1 Coherence . . . 222
9.1.2.1.1 Temporal coherence . . . 222
9.1.2.1.2 Spatial coherence . . . 223
9.1.2.2 Two-beam interference . . . 223
9.1.2.3 Interference in a plane-parallel plate . . . 224
9.1.2.4 Vector effects of interference . . . 226

9.1.3 Interferometry for optical testing . . . 228
9.1.3.1 Basic interferometer types . . . 228
9.1.3.1.1 Michelson interferometer . . . 228
9.1.3.1.2 Twyman–Green interferometer . . . 229
9.1.3.1.3 Fizeau interferometer . . . 230
9.1.3.1.4 Mach–Zehnder interferometer . . . 230
9.1.3.1.5 Shearing interferometry . . . 231
9.1.3.1.6 Fabry–Perot interferometer . . . 231
9.1.3.2 Quantitative electronic phase evaluation techniques . . . 231
9.1.3.2.1 The Fourier-transform technique . . . 232
9.1.3.2.2 Fringe analysis by phase shifting . . . 232
9.1.3.2.3 Phase-locked interferometry . . . 234
9.1.4 Interferometry for surface metrology . . . 234
9.1.4.1 Interferometry with extended range and reduced sensitivity: Oblique incidence interferometry . . . 234
9.1.4.1.1 Prismatic interferometer with oblique incidence . . . 234
9.1.4.1.2 Grating interferometer with oblique incidence . . . 236
9.1.4.2 Multiwavelength interferometry . . . 236
9.1.4.3 White-light interferometry . . . 237
9.1.4.4 Polarization interferometry . . . 239
9.1.5 Heterodyne interferometry for velocity and distance measurement . . . 241
9.1.5.1 Principle of heterodyne interferometry . . . 241
9.1.5.2 Absolute heterodyne interferometry: Double heterodyne interferometry (DHI) . . . 243
9.1.6 Interferometry with adaptive optics . . . 244
9.1.6.1 Interferometry with a null corrector . . . 244
9.1.6.2 Adaptive optics with optical light modulator . . . 246
9.1.6.3 Adaptive optics with deformable membrane mirror . . . 247
9.1.6.4 Adaptive optics for optical stitching using dynamically tilted reference wave . . . 249
9.1.7 Speckle pattern interferometry . . . 250
9.1.7.1 Some properties of speckles . . . 251
9.1.7.2 Speckle applications . . . 253
9.1.7.3 Speckle pattern interferometry for deformation measurements . . . 253
9.1.7.4 Phase analysis in speckle interferometry . . . 256
9.1.7.4.1 Phase analysis by phase stepping . . . 256
9.1.7.4.2 Phase analysis by spatial phase shifting . . . 256
9.1.7.4.3 Analysis of vibrating objects . . . 257
9.1.7.5 Temporal speckle pattern interferometry (TSPI) . . . 257
9.1.7.5.1 Shape measurement with TSPI by using time-varying wavelength change . . . 259
9.1.7.5.2 Laser diode with external cavity for wavelength change . . . 259
9.1.7.5.3 Application of TSPI for deformation measurement . . . 260
9.1.7.5.4 Deformation measurements by TSPI and digital holography, a comparison . . . 260
9.1.7.5.5 Vibration measurement with TSPI . . . 262
9.1.8 Holographic interferometry . . . 263
9.1.8.1 Principle of holography . . . 263
9.1.8.2 Principle of holographic interferometry . . . 265
9.1.8.3 Digital holography . . . 266
9.1.8.3.1 Principle of digital holography . . . 266
9.1.8.3.2 Configurations for recording and reconstruction of digital holograms . . . 267
9.1.8.3.2.1 Lensless Fourier hologram . . . 269

9.1.8.3.2.2 Fresnel hologram . . . 270
9.1.8.3.2.3 Image-plane hologram . . . 271
9.1.8.4 Digital holographic interferometry . . . 272
9.1.8.4.1 Principle of digital holographic interferometry . . . 272
9.1.8.4.2 Digital holographic interferometry for dynamic deformations . . . 272
9.1.8.4.2.1 Dimensional measurements . . . 272
9.1.8.4.2.2 Digital holographic interferometry for deformation and vibration analysis of 3D objects . . . 273
9.1.8.4.3 Pulsed digital holographic interferometry for endoscopic investigations . . . 276
9.1.8.4.4 Temporal phase unwrapping of digital holograms . . . 278
References for 9.1 . . . 280

Index . . . 285